

Opening Statement
Chairman Dan Burton
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere
Committee on International Relations
“Report of the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba”
July 27, 2006

Today the Subcommittee will hear from Cuba Transition Coordinator Caleb McCarry and discuss details of the Report of the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba.

I know a great deal of consultation and energy went into the work of the Commission and I applaud the hard work of Secretary Condoleezza Rice, Secretary Carlos Gutierrez, Caleb McCarry, and others who contributed to this report. It is our intention today to examine the recommendations of the Commission’s inter-agency strategic plan to assist a Cuban-led transition.

There is moral clarity in the report which reaffirms the United States' strong commitment to the democratic forces of Cuba.

Many people have sacrificed for the cause of justice and freedom in Cuba. It has been a long, hard struggle. The forces for change are both within and outside Cuba, and they are driving discourse about what a possible transition scenario will look like. There is optimism among some observers and participants in this struggle. Others are passive and counsel restraint in any discussion of Cuba after Castro.

The dawn of a long-awaited transformation in Cuba may be near. Many Cubans long for the day when a culture of suspicion, surveillance, persecution, brutality and injustice makes way for a new paradigm of political and economic freedom. They long for a day when the light of democracy replaces the hopeless cycle of darkness and deprivation.

The Commission report states “this is a time for bold, decisive action and clarity of message” and I support this approach. Good neighbors engage their neighbors, and when a struggle is just and noble, neighbors do not remain silent.

With the \$80 million President George W. Bush pledged to the initiative, we can truly assist Cuban media outlets and civil society organizations, and provide these pro-democratic movements with the means to effectively spread their message of hope and freedom to the Cuban people.

Cuba’s transition will be a Cuban-led transition. The Commission report is not a “provocation.” If anything, it is a compass for preparation, for policy, and for practice so that we are positioned to help the people of Cuba *help themselves*, and begin the process of normalizing bilateral relations.

When the first report of the Commission was released two years ago there were critics who said the report represented a narrow and shallow understanding of Cuban history and current conditions there. Let me speak to these critics: Where I come from in Indiana, neighbors help their neighbors if they are in need. And our Cuban neighbors have been suffering.

We are not the final arbiters of justice and morality. Nor do we hold a monopoly on the commodities of democracy and freedom. But we do have a responsibility to stand with brave defenders of democracy, many of whom are rotting in despicable conditions in Cuba. We are preparing to assist when the transition and the potential transformation in Cuba occurs.

Fidel Castro launched his “26th of July Movement” in 1959 and since that time, the weight of one man’s will has stunted the healthy growth of Cuban Society. Today there are many Cuban constituencies and many stakeholders in the future of Cuba. The United States will continue to stand with the freedom-loving people of Cuba in solidarity to break free from the chains of this Communist regime.

I now recognize Ranking Member Engel for any statement he may wish to make.